

Feedback

Old newspapers tell of war hysteria that led to internment

In the eight years since the case of reparations to Japanese Americans interned during World War II was reopened, I've seen very little in newspapers on the background and events which resulted in the internment camp program.

Time has a way of dimming memory, and even many folks who well remember Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor Dec. 7, 1941 have forgotten the combination of facts and national war hysteria that led to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 Feb. 19, 1942.

The order authorized the Secretary of War to prescribe military areas to which "any and all persons" who represented a threat to national security could be restricted.

Nearly 120,000 West Coast Japanese Americans and 1,000 Alaskan Aleuts were hastily transferred to internment camps in seven inland states. The Supreme Court upheld Order 9066. Congress did not question it. Gov. Earl Warren of California gave it his blessing.

For a better understanding of the emergency that motivated Washington leaders responsible for peace and safety of the nation, let's turn back to newspaper files of over 46 years ago.

But first, perhaps you read just recently that the U.S. Senate, pretty much following the recommendations of a study commission established in 1980, voted 69-27 to approve a \$1.3 billion bill that would direct the government to make individual maximum tax-free payments of \$20,000 to resident aliens and Japanese Americans who had been "confined ... or otherwise deprived of liberty" because of the executive order.

About half of the internees survive today. Payments would be over a five-year period with priority to the elderly.

The bill also specified there would be an apology. Two amendments to delete the payments, leaving only the apology, were voted down. Another amendment by Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C. to withhold payment until Japan compensates American families for losses suffered at Pearl Harbor was rejected 91-4.

As this was written, President Reagan had neither signed nor vetoed the measure.

Now back to 1941: Many recall vividly the shock that swept America after Japanese planes bombed Pearl Harbor and other military installations in Hawaii, inflicting heavy casualties and badly crippling our Pacific fleet and air power. The United States declared war Dec. 8.

The very next day military authorities said enemy planes had approached the central California coast, and ordered nighttime blackouts that extended to the Pacific Northwest. San Fran-



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cisco had five blackouts in a week on "verified reports of unidentified planes flying over the Bay area and dropping flares."

Headlines such as "Pacific Coast Makes Plans for Defense" appeared Dec. 17 after widening Japanese war operations and growing fears of a West coast invasion.

Japan had captured Guam, Wake Island and Singapore; was pressing its invasion of the Philippines and was striking at the stronghold of Java.

Rumors were spreading of civilian "fifth column" operations to aid the enemy. On Dec. 30, Navy Secretary Frank Knox said in a dispatch by foreign correspondent Wallace Carroll that the Japanese were helped in their Pearl Harbor attack by "the most effective 'fifth column' activity since Norway."

(He was alluding to Germany's conquering of Norway in two months in the spring of 1940 with the help of sabotage by a "fifth column" led by the infamous Vidkun Quisling.)

Carroll, who spent many days interviewing people in Hawaii, told of "Japan's amazing espionage organizations in the islands," with a point by point listing of an alleged specifics.

Anxieties had been heightened by news reports that nine U.S. ships had been attacked in coastal waters between Dec. 18 and 24, with one sunk and two damaged. On Dec. 26, U.S. patrol ships sank a Japanese submarine.

Two days before Roosevelt's executive order it was announced in San Francisco that 17 Japanese nationals had been arrested "in a government drive to prevent sabotage and 'fifth column' activity." Five of those held allegedly were linked to the armed forces of Japan.

This was the atmosphere in which American leaders established the internment program. Right or wrong, it was done as a national security measure in a wartime exigency.

Spokesmen for reparations called the episode a "black chapter" in U.S. history. Wars bring about injustices and certainly there were injustices here.

The issue became a "hot potato" in Congress. The Japanese American Claims Act was passed and between 1949 and 1960 that program dealt with 26,500 cases and paid claimants \$38 million.

I followed the 1980 reopening of the reparations drive in the Congressional Record and believed then, as I do now, that still-pending claims should have been handled through the earlier Claims Act. If the Act was inadequate or two niggardly, as some declared, certainly Congress could have amended it.

How much better, in my opinion, it would have been to have finished the case then, when many Washington leaders of the war era could have testified ... when the federal budget was less than \$100 billion (it's now over \$1 trillion) ... and the national debt was under \$300 billion compared to upwards of \$2.3 trillion now!

The new reparations program will add to deficit spending at a time when the national debt already totals about \$10,000 per capita.

I wonder if treating all internee survivors substantially alike will slight the businessman, farmer or other older person who suffered heavy losses, while amounting to a break of unnecessary dimension for those who were youngsters during the war.

The internment camp with which I'm familiar — and I presume all were similar — had government-provided elementary and high schools, a gymnasium, a library, movies, and recreation programs such as baseball, basketball, volleyball, and softball. These didn't take the sting or loneliness out of being confined, but they helped.

We must remember, of course, that untold millions in this country, including many Japanese American citizens who fought in the war, suffered and sacrificed in one way or another — financially, military privations, hardships at home, the loss or serious wounding of loved ones at the front, temporary impairment of freedoms, etc.

In the context that the only compensation families of soldiers killed in War II received was \$10,000 from the G.I. insurance, does it seem to you that \$20,000 may be out of line for internees who were children or youth in the war year?

The settlement must be especially puzzling to "downwinder families" of Nevada, Arizona and Utah who thus far have received only adamant government opposition in their appeals for compensation for leukemia and cancer deaths attributed to nuclear tests in Nevada. Such tests had their origins in the same war, with development of the atomic bomb.

ve changed over the years

changes we could make.

However, if we are going to talk about physical health, then it may not be too far removed to talk about economics. Economically, there is a serious question

as to whether or not the money spent on pollution control, or the money lost by a plant shutting down, is worth it. I personally believe the evidence is much stronger than, dollar for dollar, money used to discourage a federally-subsidized tobacco indus-

try and that kind of smoke is more beneficial to health. And if we were really charitable, our dollars could actually save lives, lives of people of equal worth and value as ourselves in Mali or Ethiopia.

Of course, local residents here are innocent bystanders of the pollutants. And there is the perhaps larger issue of beauty. It would help my heart to see the employees and high-salaried managers voluntarily improve the environment outside of the

interests of just "good business."

Like the rest of the human race, though, I'm too often satisfied to see the "other guy" bear the burden. However, I am no longer that college kid who can easily downgrade Geneva Stele. If I don't enjoy some of the by-products of an industry now, I'm more hesitant to resort to the power of government as a "correct-all."

Don Ricks
Provo

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